DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 165 039 CG 013 098

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TITLE Study of Returning Students, Part 1: Some Descriptive Characteristics.
SPONS AGENCY Toronto Board of Education (Ontario). Research Dept.
PUB DATE Aug 78
NOTE 52p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$3.50 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Dropout Identification; *Dropouts; Foreign Countries; Research Projects; Secondary Education; Sex Differences; *Student Characteristics; *Teenagers; *Urban Dropouts
IDENTIFIERS *Ontario (Toronto); *Returning Students

ABSTRACT

A total of 1,150 returning students identified themselves in a questionnaire answered by 86% of all regular Toronto high school students. The results produced the following profile of the "typical" returning student. He is male (60%); dropped out of a Toronto school (75%); dropped out once (86%); dropped out at age 15, 16 or 17 (76%); dropped out of grades 9,10 or 11 (76%); is enrolled in grades 10, 11 or 12 (73%); dropped out of levels 4 or 5 in Ontario (77%); is enrolled in levels 4 or 5 (76%); and re-enrolled in the same school (64%). Also included are findings describing interesting points about eight subsets of returning students. The subsets were chosed according to characteristics obvious to the staff in the high schools -- sex, grade level, and school last left. (BN)

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CG 013098

THE BOARD OF EDUCATION FOR THE CITY OF TORONTO

ISSN 0316-8786
ISBN 0-83881-150-0

STUDY OF RETURNING STUDENTS

PART I

Some Descriptive Characteristics

Sylvia Larter
John FitzGerald

#148

August, 1978

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their thanks to:

-- *all staff and students in the Toronto high schools who participated in the study, and provided us with an unusually high rate of response.*

-- *Lynda Groves who typed the first draft and constructed all the graphs.*

-- *Linda Theis who typed the final report.*

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INTRODUCTION

In June of 1977, the School Programs Committee of the Toronto Board of Education received and approved a recommendation from the Report of the Patterns of Dropping Out Committee --

> "that information for future decision-making be obtained about the following: the returning student; characteristics, work experience, and the attitude of the schools to their return."
> (page 10)

The recommendation was referred to the Director of Education for a feasibility report, and the recommendation was passed by the Board in October, 1977.

The data for this study were gathered by the Research Department in five phases:

Phase I: Survey of all Toronto secondary school students to identify returning students and some of their characteristics.

Phase II: A questionnaire to a sample of Toronto secondary school students who have never dropped out to determine their attitudes toward returning students.

Phase III: A questionnaire to all Toronto secondary school principals and vice-principals, all secondary school guidance counsellors, and a sample of secondary school teachers to determine their attitudes toward returning students.

Phase IV: In-depth interviews of approximately 250 returning students.

Phase V: Identification of and in-depth interviews of a matched group of students who have dropped out of school and not returned.

This report, which provides information about the characteristics of returning students as collected in Phase I, is the first of three reports describing the results of this study. The second report deals with Phases II and III and the third report deals with Phases IV and V.

Literature Review

An Ontario Study

The Ontario Secondary School Dropout Study completed by Cicely Watson and Sharon McElroy in 1974-75 for the Ontario Ministry Task Force on Dropouts contains some information about returning students and was the only Ontario and Canadian study which could be found about students who have returned to regular school. The final portion of that report deals with re-entries defined as dropouts who had returned to the same school. It reports the questionnaire responses of a sample of 1974-75 re-entries from one large Ontario urban school system. The following summarizes some of the results:

> "In brief, re-entrants are likely to be those dropouts who left the three higher grades of secondary schools. However, they do not stay long in school, and the probability of their leaving again is high (particularly if they are over 19 years of age). To a greater extent than other dropouts their parents did not approve their leaving school (and this is likely to be one factor in the return decision). To a greater extent than other dropouts, they were unemployed (and this is likely to be the main reason why they returned to school). Rather more than other dropouts, they left school because of school-related reasons (they were failing anyway; they hated school; they criticized teachers or programs) and yet they have not settled down in the outside world. Their prognosis for completion is not high. Some re-entries move in and out of school several times before they finally decide to quit -- so, without detailed data it is very difficult to show their 'stages'. Overall, net re-entries represent about 3% of the enrolment each year."
>
> (C. Watson, Focus on Dropouts, pages 282-3)

The study found that re-entering and re-dropping out is a male activity -- the males outnumbered the females 2 to 1. It also showed that the incidence of the re-entering of Grade 9 dropouts is low, of the re-entering of Grade 10 dropouts is about what might be expected and that the re-entering of Grades 11 to 13 students is higher than would be expected.

American Studies

There are a number of American investigations of the characteristics of returners; for instance, Saleem and Miller (1963) found that at least 60 of the 625 students who dropped out of the Syracuse, New York public school in 1959-60 later returned to school, and many graduated. The study found that more young men than young women returned. An attempt was made to discover why these students returned, what kinds of students were most influenced by advice to finish high school, and which students experienced the most pressure to return. Some characteristics of those who returned were sought by comparing returner and non-returner dropouts. Returners were generally characterized by better academic standing, and a greater degree of economic and family stability. Both factors were significant for girls while economic stability proved more significant for the boys. The data indicated that returners were not clearly distinguishable from dropouts. The two groups overlapped considerably. Whenever returners were "better off," socially or academically, than non-returners, the differentiation was slight. The authors concluded that the failure to identify significant differences meant that better communication with the broad population of dropouts would be the most effective method of increasing the number of school returners.

A study performed by Wehrwein (1970) using a sample of returners at the Work Opportunity Center in Minneapolis yielded similar conclusions. Wehrwein found that approximately one-fourth of the individuals who returned to the Work Opportunity Centre were on probation or parole, that two-fifths had health problems, and that more than half had family difficulties.

Another study conducted at the Cape Fear Technical Institute (Doss, 1966) revealed that returners were more likely than non-returners to have problems and responsibilities at home, to perceive their parents as either too strict or too lenient, and to like the Institute. The returners also

appeared to receive greater encouragement from teachers or employers to finish school and to have friends attending school. In addition, relatively more non-returners had access to a car while in school, had received corporal punishment and had brothers or sisters who were dropouts.

A study with a slightly different focus (Green, 1967) was aimed at determining the impact of a return to school on the intellectual development, achievement levels, aspirations, self-concepts, and attitudes toward school of a group of black children who had been out of school for four years because of a school closure in Virginia. The study concluded that an educational interruption seemed to contribute positively to attitudes toward school, while at the same time affecting aptitudes and aspirations adversely.

Kohen and Barker (1976) made the following comments in a literature review:

> "In summary, the literature on the high school dropout who returns to school is diverse. It indicates that discontinuing high school is disadvantageous to the intellectual and aspirational development of the individual, but that a return to school can substantially alleviate the disadvantage."
>
> "Several characteristics tend to be related to the individual's desire to complete school, although family problems seem to have the greatest negative effects. The research is optimistic in predicting gain to those who do return and remain in school, even though the gains would seem to diminish the longer the interruption prior to returning."
>
> (Kohen and Barker, 1976, pp. 14 and 15)

To conclude, a detailed study of students returning to the Toronto Board of Education has never been conducted and certainly seems warranted given Toronto's high dropout rate (see Young and Reich, 1974). The study should also contribute to the obviously rather limited body of Canadian and American knowledge on returning students.

Purposes of Part One of the Study

The purposes of the first part of the study were to estimate the number of returning students in Toronto high schools as of November, 1977 (regardless of the length of time they had been back) and then to examine some of their characteristics such as number of times they had dropped out, the age they last left school, their age in November, 1977, sex, grade left and grade enrolled in during November, 1977, level of study left and returned to, school left and returned to, and whether or not they had been in the Leaving School Early Program.

METHOD

Data Collection

On November 18, 1977, questionnaires were distributed to every high school student in the Toronto Board of Education (excluding students in Adult Day schools) in order to identify students who had returned to regular school after having dropped out (a copy of this questionnaire is provided in Appendix A; this questionnaire was also designed to collect information about high school students and their employment). A computer label used to address each questionnaire provided the student's sex, year of birth, as well as the school the student was attending. Students who had returned to school were asked to state the number of times they had dropped out, whether or not they had ever been in the Leaving School Early (LSE) program, the grade and level they had left the last time they had dropped out, the age at which they had last dropped out, and the school they had last left. All students were asked to state the level they were then in. Each student's grade was inferred from the grade/class codes on the labels; the rules followed in inferring the grade are given in Appendix B.

Altogether, 29,499 students returned usable questionnaires, or 86% of the 34,270 high school students registered in November of 1977.

Data Analysis

The first set of analyses (for the original questions on the survey form) took the form of frequency counts converted to percentages and are, in many cases, presented in graphical form. In some instances, χ^2 one-sample tests with df=k-1 (where k=# categories) were used to compare observed frequencies for the sample of returning Toronto high school students with expected frequencies derived from the population of Toronto high school students. The

null hypotheses for these tests were that the characteristics of the returning students did not differ significantly from the characteristics of the population of students; that is, observed characteristics were compared with theoretically expected characteristics. For all significance tests, the significance criterion was a chance probability less than .05. The reader should also note that not every student answered every question, thus there are varying totals for the χ^2 tests.

The second group of analyses which involved examining the extent of association or relation between two sets of attributes of the returning students provided the investigators with a bit of a dilemma. The group of returning students being studied could neither be considered the entire population of 1977-78 Toronto returning students nor could it be considered a random sample of Toronto returning students. A χ^2 test of significance of a contingency coefficient calculated from a r x k contingency table is normally used to examine the degree of association between attributes when a random sample has been drawn from a population. If the entire population is being examined, contingency coefficients and/or simple percentages are used to report the results -- χ^2 tests of significance being irrelevant. The investigators decided to proceed as one would with a random sample and use χ^2 tests of significance of the contingency coefficients to determine significant associations between attributes of the returning students, keeping in mind that the sample was not a strictly random one. The χ^2 tests for these tests had (r-1) (k-1) degrees of freedom and where significant χ^2 were found, the tables were collapsed where necessary to 2 x 2 tables to test the significance of frequencies on the separate categories of the attributes. Again, the significance criterion was .05 and the totals varied considerably.

Limitations of the Data

The investigators pilot tested the questionnaire and were fairly satisfied that the students understood the questions and that the questions seemed appropriate; however, they did not do a formal validation of the questionnaire. That is, no check was made to determine whether the students who finally answered the questionnaire understood the questions, whether they were interpreting the questions as intended, or whether they were giving correct responses. The responses were accepted as they stood. One particular weakness did come to light -- the question on the Leaving School Early Program seemed to be misunderstood (this is discussed in a later section).

Information for students' date of birth and 1977 grade were obtained from the Board's records. The grade enrolled in during November, 1977 was inferred from class codes (the method is described in Appendix B) -- some errors probably resulted from this technique.

FINDINGS

The Number of Returning Students

1,150 students reported that they had dropped out of school and returned. This figure represents 3.9% of the 29,499 students who completed the questionnaire in November of 1977.

The total number of students who were returners during the 1977-78 school year was probably higher than this figure for three reasons:

(a) 4,771 students on the November school rolls did not answer the questionnaire -- some were probably returners;

(b) 1,138 students on the September school rolls were not on the November school rolls -- some were probably returners; and,

(c) some students probably returned to school after November.

Multiplying the September enrolment of 35,408 by 3.9% gives an estimate of 1,381 returning students enrolled in Toronto high schools in the Fall of 1977.

General Characteristics of Returning Students

Schools Left

● *Most returning students last dropped out of Toronto schools.*

Of the sample of returning students, 1,085 (94.3%) reported the school they had left the last time they had dropped out, and its board or city. Of these, 812, or 74.8%, reported that they had last dropped out of a Toronto high school, while another 31 reported that they had last dropped out of Toronto elementary schools, so that altogether 77.7% of the students had dropped out of Toronto schools. Another 9.6% had dropped out of schools of other boards in Metropolitan Toronto, 5.4% had dropped out of schools of other boards in

Ontario, 1.4% had dropped out of schools in other provinces, and 5.4% had dropped out of schools in other countries. Four students reported that they had dropped out of a university, a community college, or a CEGEP*, while one reported that he had dropped out of a private elementary school. Figure I displays these percentages graphically.

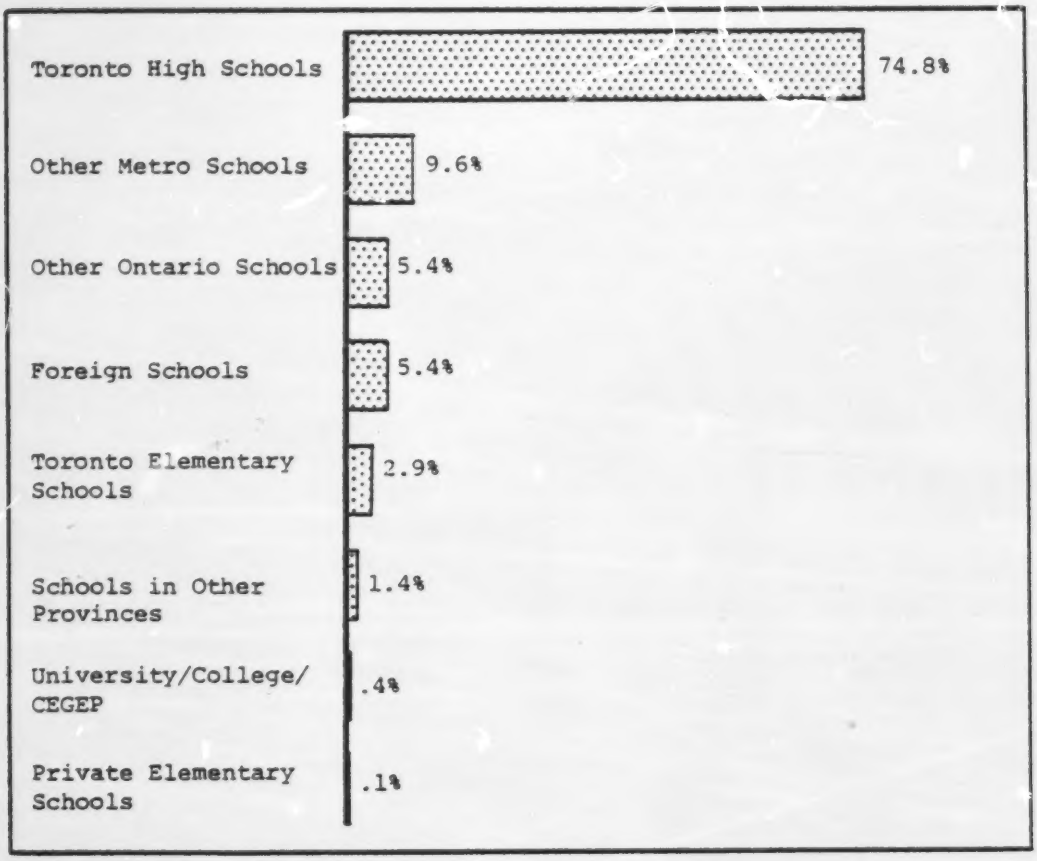

Figure 1. The schools returning students left the last time they dropped out (N = 1085).

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* CEGEP -- Collège d'enseignement général et professionel

Sex

● *Men are slightly over-represented among returning students.*

Of the 1,144 students whose sex was stated, 59.8% were men (see Figure 2).

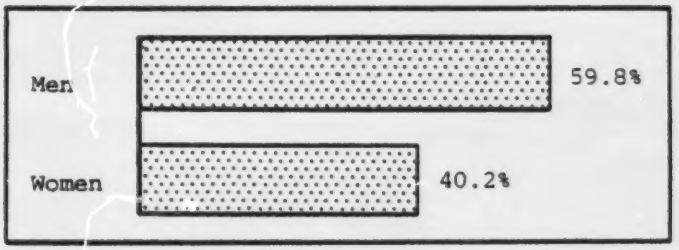

Figure 2. The sex of returning students (N = 1144).

Only 51.7% of the students who had never dropped out were men. One explanation of the above finding is that returning students are older than other students, and that in Toronto schools the older students are more likely to be men than are younger students; this explanation would imply that men are not over-represented among returning students. To test this explanation a theoretical distribution was constructed in which the sexual composition of the group which had returned to school was predicted from the sexual composition of the entire sample of students of the same age. According to the theoretical distribution, 55.8% of the returning students should be men; a chi-square test found that this percentage was significantly lower than the observed percentage of 59.8%. We can conclude, then, that men are indeed over-represented among returning students, although the over-representation is not great.

Number of Times Dropped Out

About one-seventh of the returning students reported dropping out more than once.

All but 36 of the returning students reported the number of times they had dropped out. Of these 1,114 students, 955, or 85.7% reported that they had dropped out once; 128, or 11.5%, reported that they had dropped out twice; 21, or 1.9%, reported that they had dropped out three times; and 10, or 0.9%, reported that they had dropped out four times (see Figure 3).

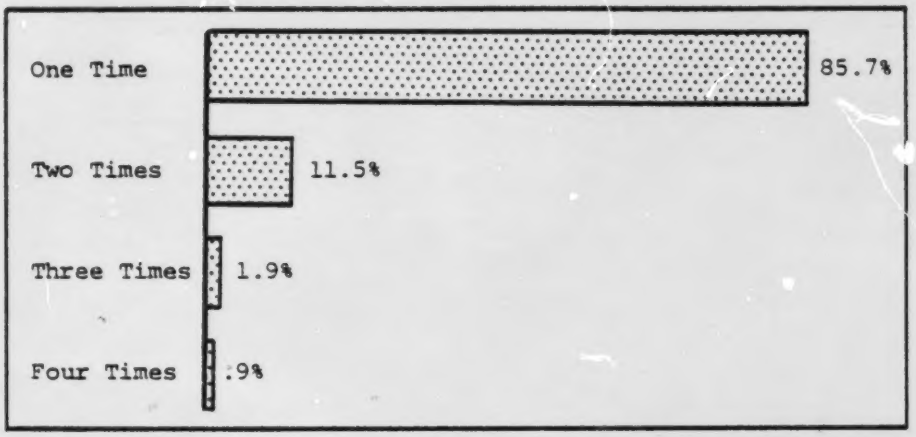

Figure 3. The number of times returning students had dropped out (N = 1114).

Age at Time of Dropping Out

More than a quarter of the students reported that they had been under 16 when they last dropped out.

Figure 4 shows the distribution for all returning students of the ages at which they last dropped out (1,084 students reported that age). It can be seen that the median age of dropping out was 16, and that 84.3% of the students reported that they had last dropped out before they had turned 18. A considerable number -- 307 or 28.3% -- reported that they had last dropped out of school before turning 16 -- 210 of these students had dropped out of Toronto schools.

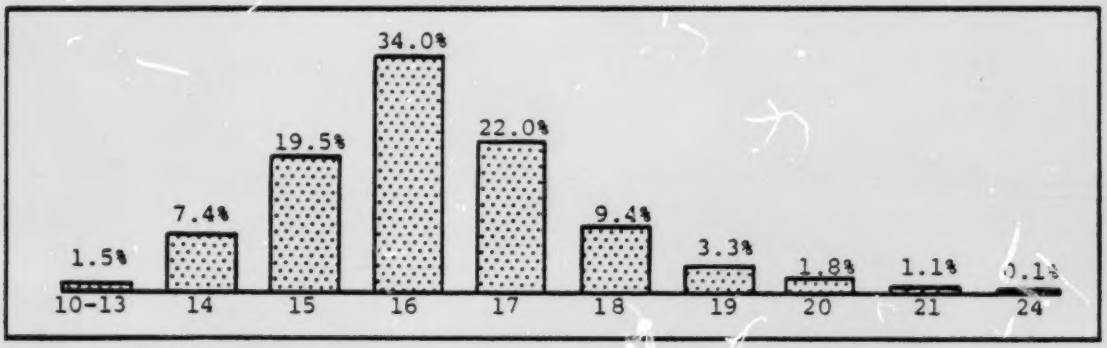

Figure 4. Ages at which returning students had last dropped out (N = 1084).

Figure 5 shows the same distribution for students who had dropped out only once. It can be seen that this distribution is almost identical with the one for all returning students. This suggests that students who had dropped out more than once had dropped out for the first time at younger ages than the students who had dropped out only once.

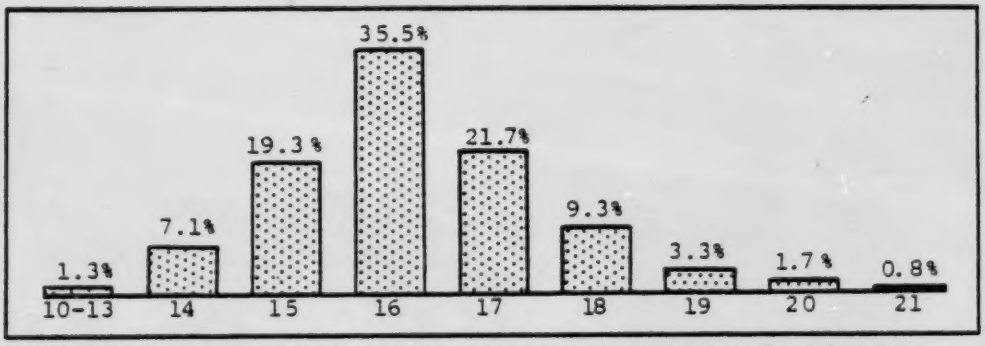

Figure 5. Ages at which one-time dropouts had left school (N = 927).

Grade at Time of Dropping Out

- *Most returning students last dropped out of Grades 9, 10 and 11.*

Figure 6 shows the grades students were in when they last dropped out. Of 1,092 students who reported a grade, 75.6% dropped out of Grades 9, 10 and 11.

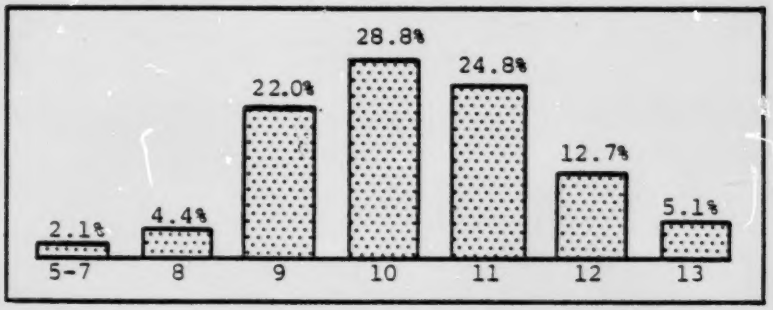

Figure 6. Grades returning students were in when they last dropped out (N = 1092).

Figure 7 shows the same kind of distribution for students who had dropped out only once (n=925). This distribution is almost identical with the distribution for all returning students and suggests that students who had dropped out more than once had started dropping out in earlier grades than the students who had dropped out only once or that they had made no progress the previous time(s) they had returned to school.

It can be seen from both distributions that most students had dropped out well before the end of any four or five-year program.

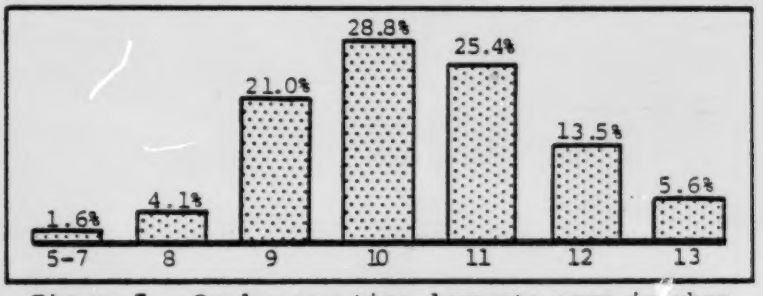

Figure 7. Grades one-time dropouts were in when they dropped out (N = 925).

Level at Time of Dropping Out

- *Over three-quarters of the returning students identified by this study who had last dropped out of Ontario secondary schools left programs where most of their courses were at levels 4 and 5.*

Data on levels of study left were available for 965 students who reported that they had last dropped out of secondary schools in Ontario; a summary of these data is given in Figure 8.

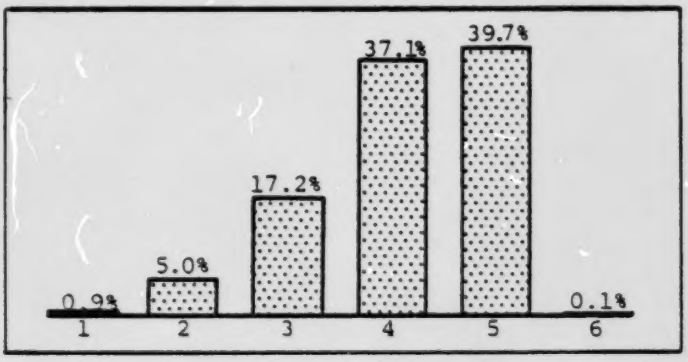

Figure 8. Levels of program left by Ontario returning students (N = 965).

The same data were examined for the 823 students who had dropped out once; the distribution was almost identical with the one shown in Figure 8.

Year of Birth

- *Half of the returning students were born before 1960 (or were over 17).*

Data on year of birth were available for 1,112 students. They are summarized in Figure 9. Of these students, 555, or one fewer than half, were born before 1960; only 17.3% of the sample of students who had never dropped out were born before 1960. Altogether 900, or 80.9%, of the returning students were born in the four years, 1958 through 1961; these same four years accounted for only 58.5% of the sample of students who had never dropped out. These differences are statistically significant.

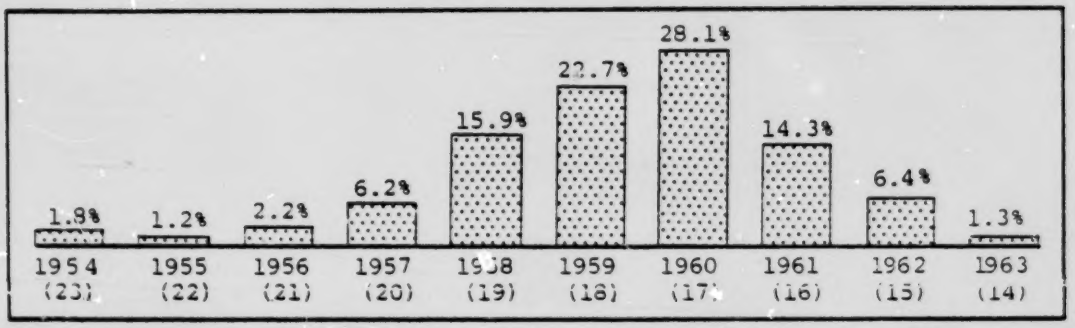

Figure 9. Years of birth of returning students (N = 1112). (These data were collected in November, 1977 -- ages at that time are shown in brackets.)

Enrolment by Grades

- *Returning students were most likely to be enrolled in grades 10, 11, and 12.*

Data about the grades in which returning students were enrolled during November 1977 were available for 881 students*; a summary of these data is given in Figure 10.

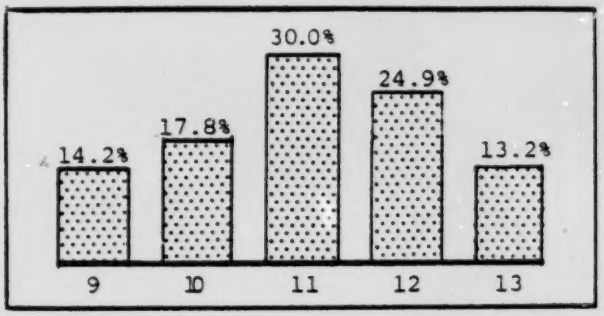

Figure 10. Grades in which returning students were enrolled during November, 1977 (N = 881).

* The number of students in this distribution is relatively small because grades had to be inferred from class codes, some of which do not permit the inferring of the grades. The rules by which grades were inferred are presented and discussed in Appendix B.

Most returning students (72.7%) were enrolled in grades 10, 11 and 12. (The reader should recall that this number includes students who have been back for more than one year.) Similar data were not inferred for students who had not dropped out.

Enrolment by Levels of Program

- *Students taking most of their courses at levels 2, 3 and 4 are over-represented among returning students, while students taking most of their courses at level 5 are under-represented.*

Figure 11 shows the percentage of students who had returned to school who reported* taking most of their courses at each level of instruction and the corresponding expected percentages calculated from the distribution for all students who completed the questionnaire. Because of the small numbers in levels 1 and 6, for the statistical analysis level 1 was combined with level 2, and level 6 with level 5. The two distributions were significantly different. Chi-square tests were used to evaluate differences in enrolment at levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 (levels 1 and 6 were not reported frequently enough to examine) and found that all differences between observed and expected frequencies were significant.

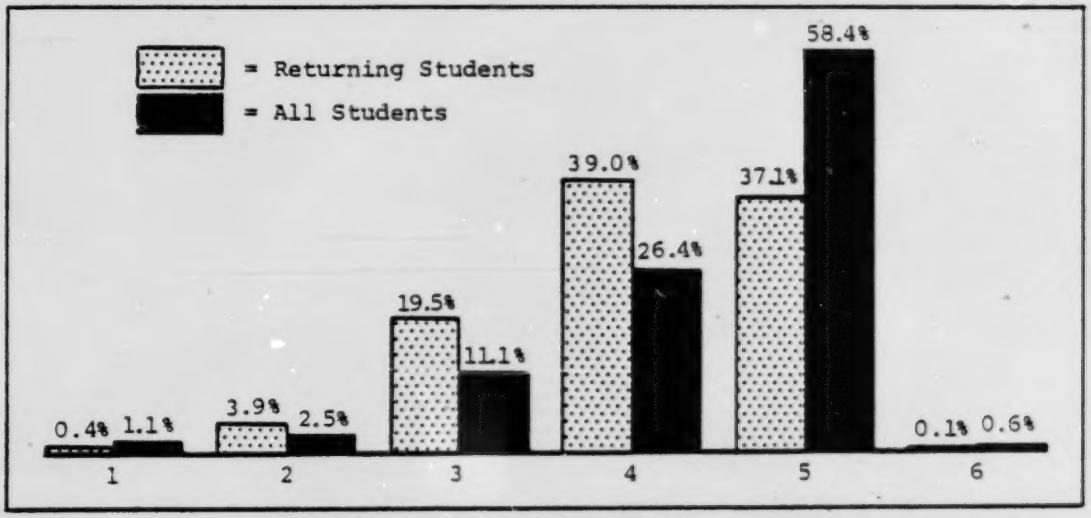

Figure 11. Levels of program in which students were taking most of their courses during November, 1977 (N = 1113 returning students).

* There was some inaccuracy in the reports of level of study. Of the sample, 32 students, or 2.7%, reported studying at levels which were not provided in their schools. This inaccuracy is not great enough to invalidate the findings.

Comparisons of Toronto Students who Re-enrolled in the Schools They Had Left and Toronto Students who Enrolled in a Different School

- *Students who had returned to different schools than the ones they had left tended to have dropped out in lower grades and at earlier ages than students who had re-enrolled in the schools they had left, and to be enrolled in lower grades; however, they also tended to be older in November, 1977, and were more likely to have dropped out more than once.*

Of the 812 students who dropped out of high schools in the City of Toronto, 803 reported the names of both the school they were attending and the school they had left when they had last dropped out. Of these 803 students, 510, or 63.5% had returned to the schools they had left when they had last dropped out.

Figure 12 shows the grades left by the two groups of students; the distributions are significantly different. Students who enrolled in a different school are significantly more likely to have dropped out of Grade 9, and less likely to have dropped out of Grades 11 and 12 than students who re-enrolled in the same school.

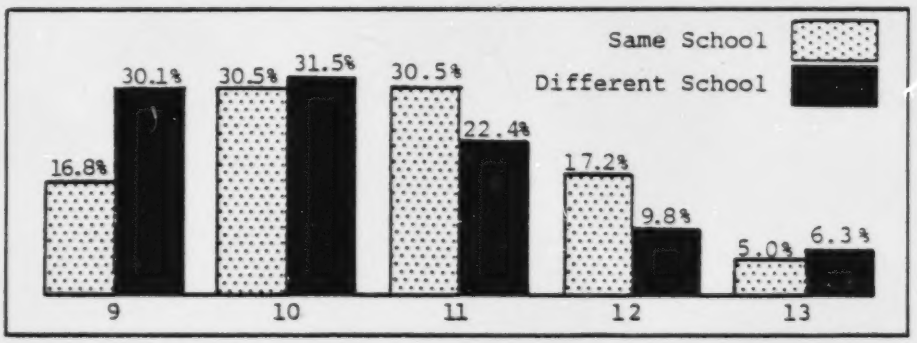

Figure 12. Grades left by Toronto students who returned to the same schools (N = 501) or to different schools (N = 286).

Figure 13 shows the distributions of grades in which the two groups were enrolled in 1977; the distributions are significantly different. Students who re-enrolled in the same school are significantly more likely to be enrolled in Grade 12 than students who enrolled in a different school. If these distributions are collapsed into distributions of enrolment in the junior and

senior grades,* the two groups again differ significantly. Students who re-enrolled in the same school are significantly more likely to be enrolled in the senior grades than students who enrolled in a different school. (The reader should again recall that the study included students who had returned to school previous to the Fall of 1977.)

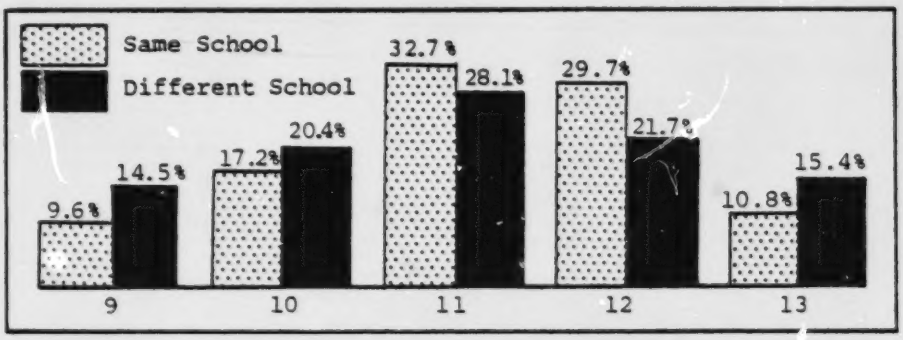

Figure 13. Enrolment by grades for Toronto students who returned to the same schools (N = 407) or to different schools (N = 221).

Students who enrolled in a different school were significantly more likely to have dropped out more than once; 15.3% (of 288) of these students had dropped out more than once, compared to 11.3% (of 508) of students who had re-enrolled in the same school.

Figure 14 gives the distribution for each group of the ages at which students last dropped out; the distributions are significantly different. Toronto students who re-enrolled in the same school are significantly less

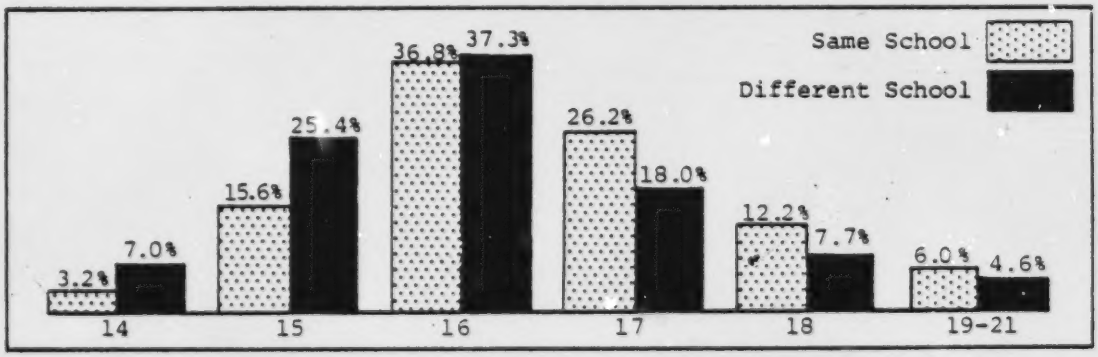

Figure 14. The ages at which Toronto students who returned to the same schools (N = 500) or to different schools (N = 284) last dropped out.

* For the remainder of the report, junior grades will mean grades 9 and 10 and senior grades will mean grades 11, 12 and 13.

likely to have dropped out at ages 14 or 15, and more likely to have dropped out at age 17 than Toronto students who enrolled in a different school.

Figure 15 gives the distributions of years of birth for both groups; the distributions are significantly different. Students who re-enrolled in the same school were significantly less likely to have been born before 1959 (over 18 years of age) and significantly more likely to have been born in 1959 (18 years of age) than students who enrolled in a different school.

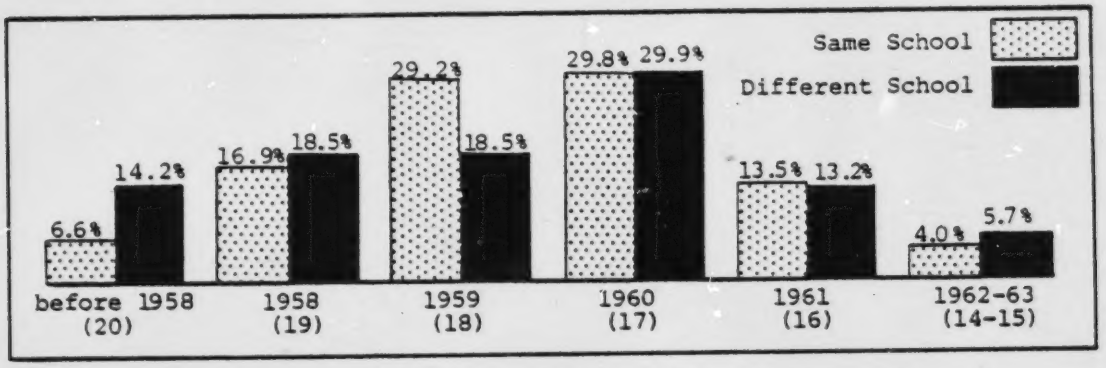

Figure 15. Years of birth of Toronto students who returned to the same schools (N = 503) or to different schools (N = 281) (ages are shown in brackets).

Membership in the two groups was not related to sex, the levels at which students had been studying when they had last dropped out, or the levels at which they were studying in 1977.

Differences Between Sexes

- *Women were more likely than men to have last dropped out at younger ages, to have last dropped out in lower grades, and to be enrolled in the junior grades during November, 1977.*

In general, women who had returned to school had last dropped out at younger ages and from lower grades than had men who had returned to school, although they were not younger in November, 1977 than the men. Women were significantly more likely to have dropped out before Grade 11. Altogether 61.1% (266 of 435) of women dropped out before Grade 11, compared to 54.6% (355 of 650) of men. Women were also more likely than men to have dropped out before turning 16; of 428 women who reported the age at which they had dropped out 147, or 34.3%, had dropped out before turning 16, compared to 24.3% (158) of 649 men.

There were no statistically significant differences in the proportions of men and women enrolled in <u>each</u> grade, although women were more likely than men to be enrolled in the junior grades. Of 352 women for whom grades were inferred from the class code, 66.3% were in the junior grades, compared to 58.8% of 527 men.

These results are shown in Figures 16, 17 and 18.

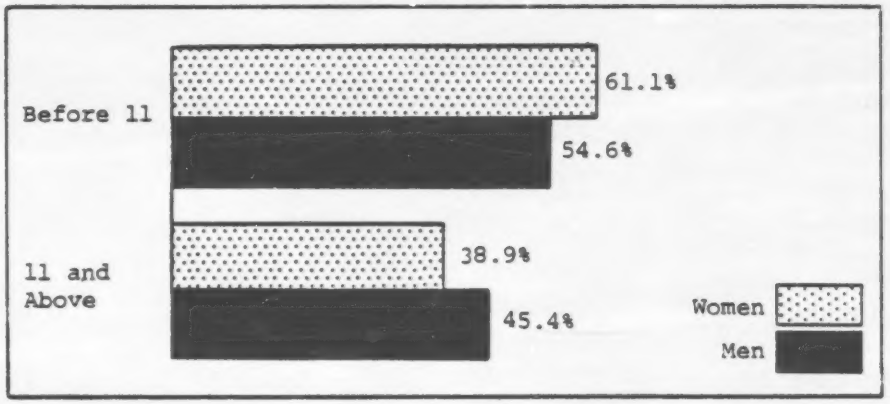

Figure 16. Grades last dropped out for women (N = 435) and men (N = 650).

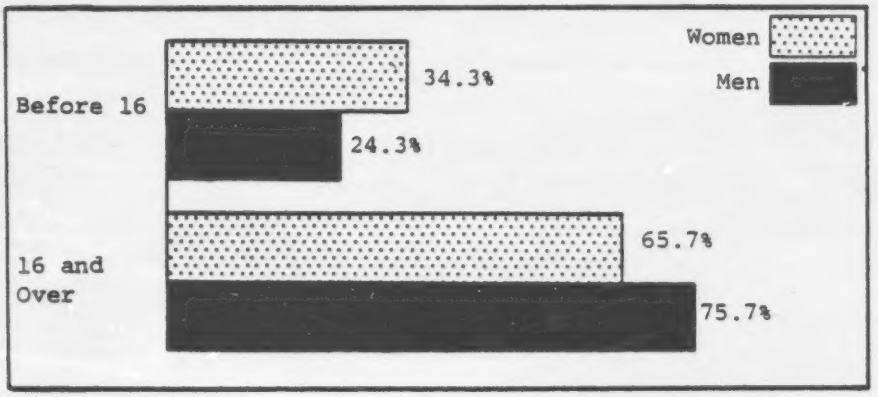

Figure 17. Ages of students at last date of dropping out for women (N = 428) and men (N = 649).

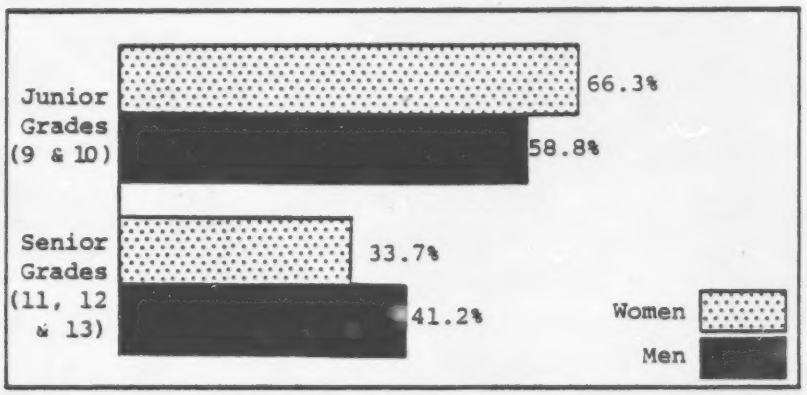

Figure 18. November, 1977 enrolment by grades for women (N=352) and men (N=527)

There were no statistically significant differences between the proportions of men and women who dropped out more than once, who dropped out of different levels (for Ontario students) and who enrolled in different levels.

Comparisons of Students Who Last Dropped Out in the Junior and Senior Grades

- *Students who last dropped out of the Junior grades were more likely to be younger in November, 1977, to be enrolled in lower grades, to have last dropped out at younger ages, to be women, to have dropped out more than once, to have last dropped out at lower levels, and to be enrolled at lower levels than were students who last dropped out of the Senior grades.*

The difference between sexes was discussed on page 21. As might be expected, students who had last dropped out of grades 11, 12 and 13 were older in November, 1977, were older when they last dropped out, and were enrolled in higher grades in November, 1977.

Students who last dropped out of the junior grades were more likely than students who had dropped out of the senior grades to have dropped out more than once. Of 549 students who had dropped out of the junior grades, 89 or 16.2% had dropped out more than once, while of 462 students who had dropped out of the senior grades, 49 or 10.6% had dropped out more than once (see Figure 19).

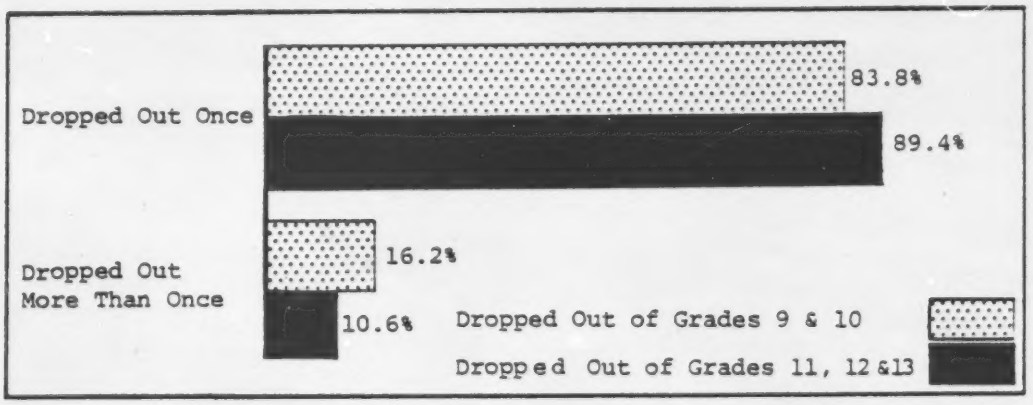

Figure 19. Number of times dropped out for students who last dropped out of the junior grades (N = 549) and for students who last dropped out of the senior grades (N = 462).

The remaining significant differences observed were in the levels from which students had last dropped out and at which they were studying in 1977. Of 357 students who had last dropped out of the junior grades, 80, or 22.4%, had been studying at levels 1, 2 or 3 before they had dropped out; of 367 students who had last dropped out of the senior grades, 32, or 8.7%, had been studying at levels 1, 2 or 3 (see Figure 20).

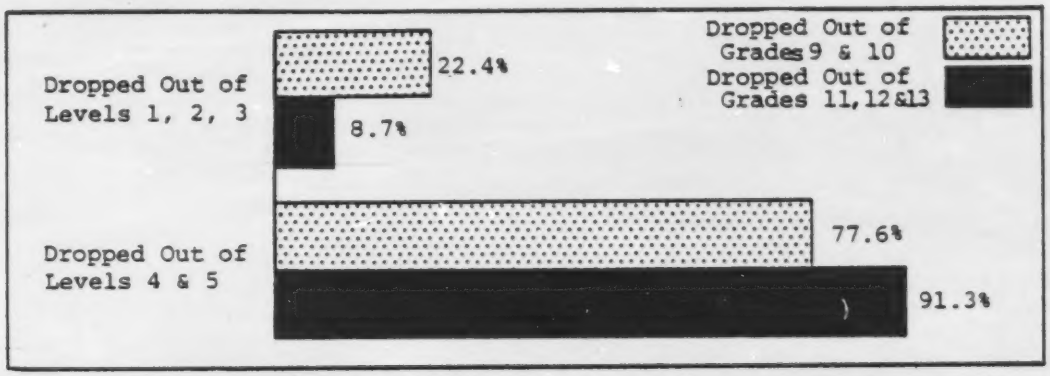

Figure 20. Levels left for Ontario students who last dropped out of the junior grades (N = 357) and for Ontario students who last dropped out of the senior grades (N = 367).

Of 541* students who last dropped out of the junior grades, 168, or 31.1% were enrolled in 1977 in levels 1, 2 and 3; of 458 students who had last dropped out of the senior grades, 48, or 10.5%, were enrolled in 1977 in levels 1, 2 or 3 (see Figure 21). Further analysis revealed that Ontario students who had dropped out of the junior grades were more likely to have re-enrolled at a lower level of instruction than students who had dropped out of the senior grades; 16.8% of the former group had re-enrolled at a lower level, compared to 9.4% of the latter.

* The numbers of students in the two analyses for levels are greatly different because the second analysis includes students who dropped out of schools outside Ontario.

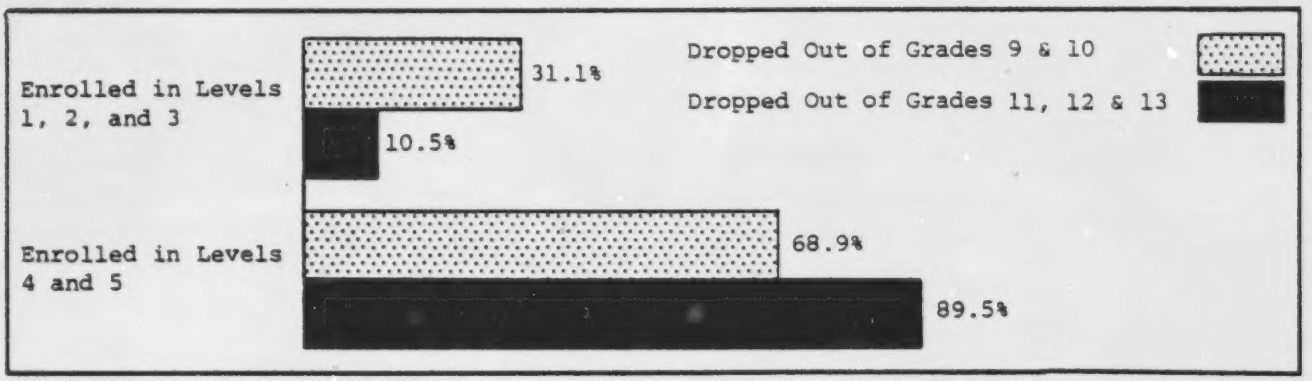
Enrolled in Levels 1, 2, and 3
31.1%
10.5%
Enrolled in Levels 4 and 5
68.9%
89.5%
Dropped Out of Grades 9 & 10
Dropped Out of Grades 11, 12 & 13

Figure 21. Levels enrolled in for 1977 for students who last dropped out of the junior grades (N = 541) and for students who last dropped out of the senior grades (N = 458).

Comparisons Between Students Who Dropped Out Once Before Turning 16 and Those Who Dropped Out Once After Turning 16

- *Students who were one-time dropouts before turning 16 were more likely to be women, to have dropped out at lower grades, to be younger in November 1977, and to be enrolled in lower grades than students who were one-time dropouts after turning 16.*

The analyses reported in this section were restricted to students who had dropped out only once, so that differences between the two groups would be clearer. As would be expected from a difference observed between sexes (see page 21), students who dropped out before turning 16 were more likely to be women than were students who dropped out after 16; 51.2% of the students who dropped out before turning 16 were women, compared to 37.1% of the other returning students. A median test revealed that students who had dropped out before turning 16 were much younger in November, 1977 than students who had dropped out after turning 16 -- only 20.3% of the students who dropped out before turning 16 were born before 1960, compared to 61.8% of the other returning students (see Figure 22).

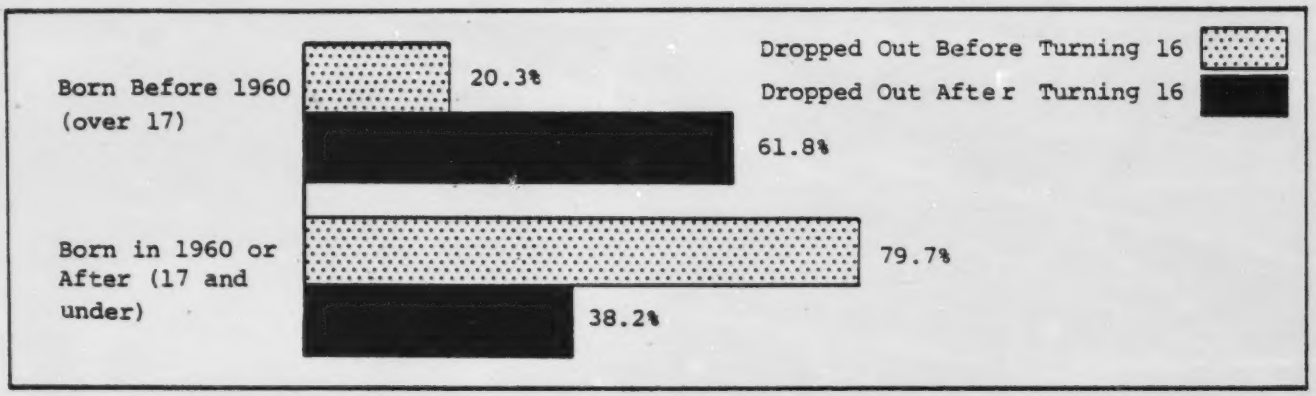

Figure 22. Dates of birth for students who dropped out once before turning 16 (N = 251), or after turning 16 (N = 677).

As one would expect, students who had dropped out before turning 16 had dropped out of lower grades than students who had dropped out after turning 16. They were also enrolled in lower grades in November, 1977, as Figure 23 shows. Nearly two-thirds of the students who had dropped out before turning 16 were enrolled in the junior grades, compared to less than a fifth of other returning students. On the other hand, 35% had progressed to the senior grades since returning to school.

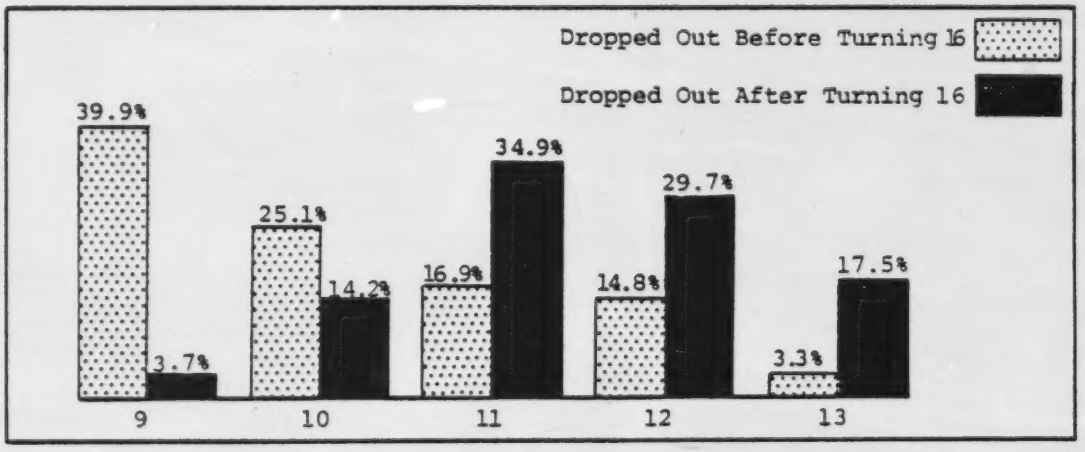

Figure 23. November, 1977 enrolment by grades for returning students who dropped out once before turning 16 (N = 183) or once after turning 16 (N = 542).

Whether or not the returning students had dropped out before turning 16 was not related to the levels of instruction at which they had been studying before they dropped out (the analysis excluded students who reported that they had dropped out before reaching Grade 9). However, it was related to the level at which returning students were studying in November, 1977, as Figure 24 shows. Further analysis revealed that students who dropped out of Ontario high schools before turning 16 were more likely than other returning students to re-enrol at a lower level of instruction and less likely to re-enrol at the same level of instruction.

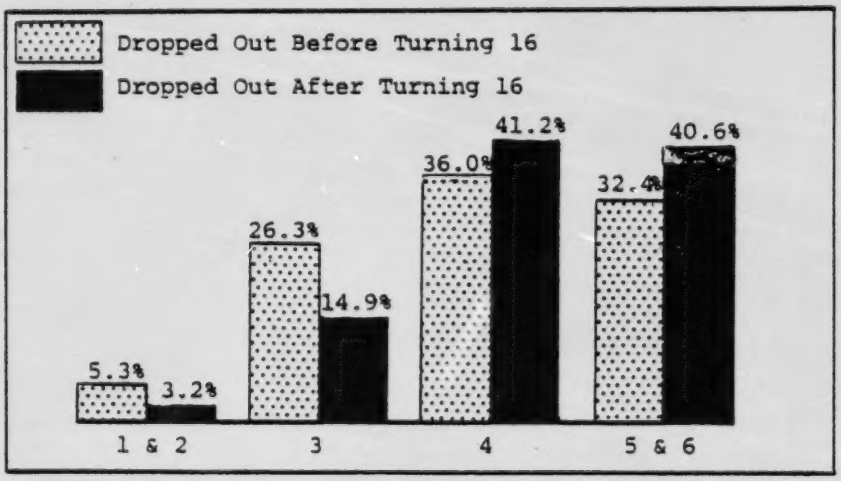

Figure 24. November, 1977 enrolment by levels of instruction for students who dropped out once before turning 16 (N = 296), or after turning 16 (N = 719).

Comparisons Between Students Who Had Dropped Out Once and Students Who Had Dropped Out More Than Once

- *Students who had dropped out more than once were more likely than students who had dropped out only once to have last dropped out from an elementary grade, less likely to have last dropped out of a senior grade, and more likely to be studying at levels 1, 2, or 3, in November, 1977.*

The differences* in grades last left are shown in Figure 25. Students who had dropped out more than once were significantly more likely than students who had dropped out only once to have last dropped out from an elementary grade and less likely to have last dropped out of a senior grade.

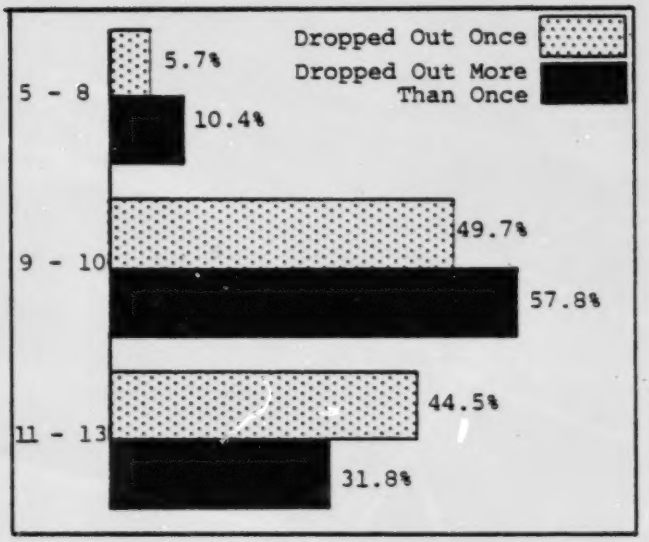

Figure 25. Grades last left by students who had dropped out once (N = 925) and more than once (N = 154).

Students who had dropped out more than once were more likely than other returning students to be studying at levels 1, 2, or 3; of 153 students who had dropped out more than once, 46 or 30.1%, were studying at levels 1, 2 or 3, compared to 208, or 22.4%, of 928 students who had dropped out only once (see Figure 26).

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* The difference in the junior grades is not statistically significant even though it is larger than the difference in the elementary grades.

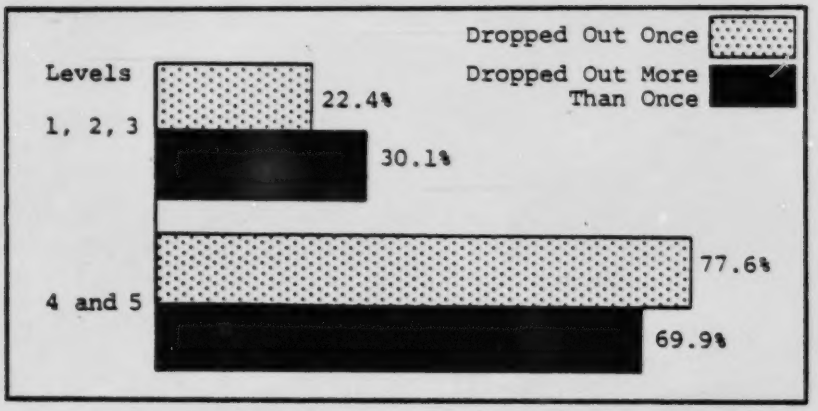

Figure 26. The November, 1977 enrolment by levels for students who had dropped out once (N = 928) and more than once (N = 153).

A median test failed to reveal any difference in the ages at which students had last dropped out (comparing those who dropped out once and more than once). Nor were there any differences in the ages of students in November, 1977, or in the proportions of students in each grade. However, students who had last dropped out of the junior grades (grades 9 and 10) were more likely to have dropped out more than once, as can be seen in Figure 29.

Sex and level of study last left were not related to number of times dropped out.

Comparisons Between Students of Different Ages

- *The older students were in 1977, the less likely they were to be enrolled in Levels 1, 2 or 3, and to have last dropped out of Levels 1, 2 or 3, the more likely they were to have last dropped out of the senior grades, and the more likely they were to have been a one-time dropout after turning 16. Students over 18 were less likely to be women and more likely to have dropped out more than once.*

For these analyses, the students were divided into three groups defined by the ages they would turn in 1977. One group was composed of students under 16, one of students aged 16 to 18, and one of students over 18. Students over 18 were statistically less likely to be women than were

other returning students; 33.4% of 302 students over 18 were women, compared to 41.9% of 563 students aged 16 to 18, and 41.6% of 245 students under 16. The older students were in 1977, the less likely they were to be enrolled in level 1, 2 or 3; 36.8% of 239 students under 16 were enrolled in level 1, 2 or 3, compared to 25.3% of 548 students aged 16 to 18, and 10.6% of students over 18. All these proportions differ significantly.

A similar trend was observed in the distributions of the levels from which students had last dropped out; 26.9% of 186 students under 16 had been enrolled in level 1, 2 or 3, compared to 23.8% of 499 students aged 16 to 18, and 17.7% of students over 18. The first and third of these percentages are significantly different.

Students over 18 were statistically more likely than other returning students to have dropped out more than once. Of 296 students over 18, 18.6% had dropped out more than once, compared to 12.2% of 548 aged 16 to 18, and 11.6% of students under 16.

Relationships for grade left and age at leaving have been previously discussed on pages 23 and 25.

Enrolment by grade for students of different ages was not analyzed as the findings are predictably trivial.

Comparisons Between Students Who in November, 1977 Were Enrolled in the Junior Grades, and Those Who Were Enrolled in the Senior Grades

- *Returning students who were enrolled in the junior grades in November, 1977 were more likely than senior students to be studying at Level 1, 2 or 3, to have last dropped out of Level 1, 2 or 3, to have dropped out more than once, to have dropped out of the junior grades, to be women, and to have been one-time dropouts before turning 16.*

Of 275 junior students, 32.7% were studying in November 1977, at level 1, 2, or 3, compared to 8.6% of 583 senior students; 22.6% of 212 junior students who dropped out of Ontario high schools had dropped out of level 1, 2, or 3, compared to 12.5% of 512 senior students who had dropped out of Ontario high schools (see Figures 27 and 28).

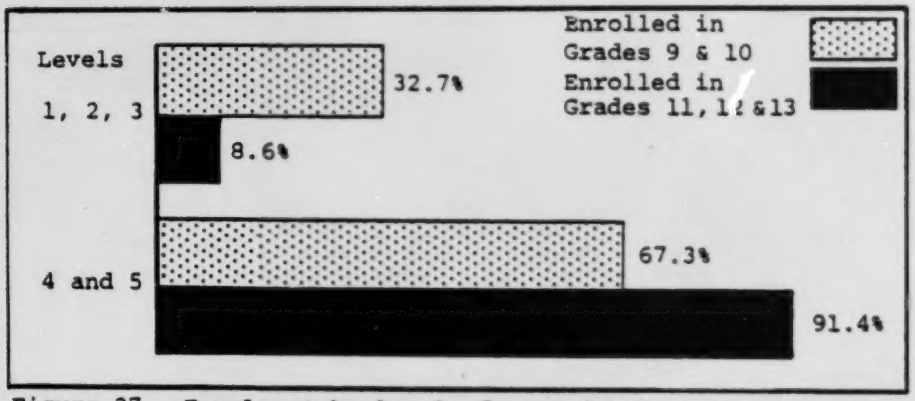

Figure 27. Enrolment by levels for students enrolled in the junior grades (N = 275) and students enrolled in the senior grades (N = 583) (November, 1977).

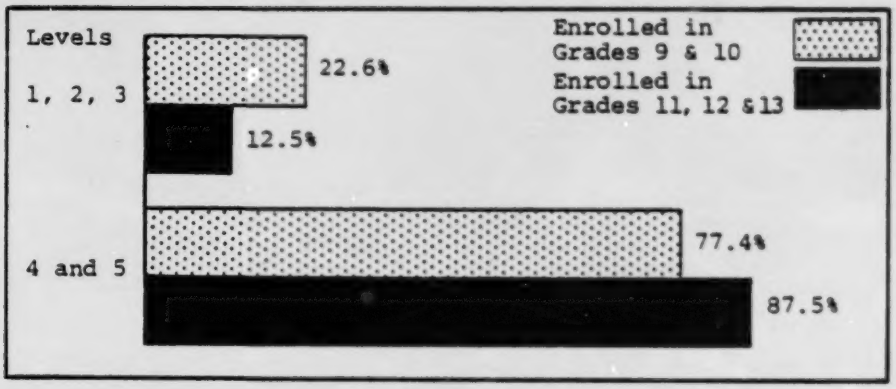

Figure 28. Levels last left for Ontario students enrolled in the junior grades (N = 212) and for Ontario students enrolled in the senior grades (N = 512).

Returning students in the junior grades were, contrary to what might be expected, more likely to have dropped out more than once than were students from the senior grades; 18.3% of 273 junior students had dropped out more than once, compared to 11.4% of 586 senior students (see Figure 29).

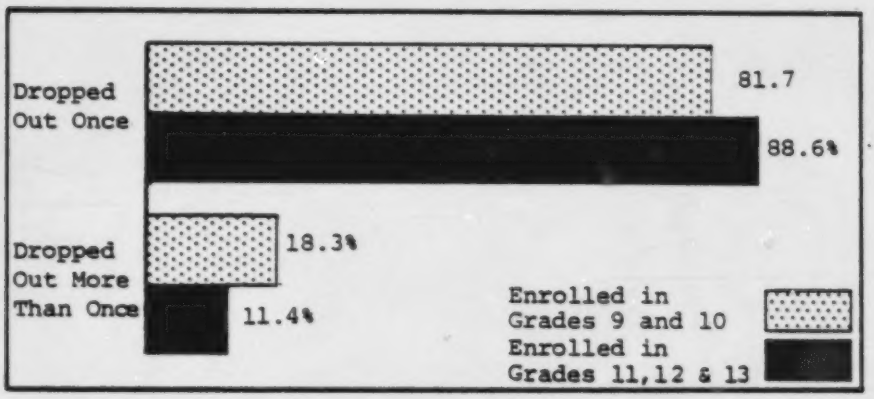

Figure 29. Number of times dropped out for students enrolled in the junior grades (N = 273) and students enrolled in the senior grades (N = 586).

The relationships by sex, grade last left and age dropped out have been discussed on pages 21, 23 and 26. As might be expected, students enrolled in the junior grades were younger than students enrolled in the senior grades.

Student Progress After Returning to School

- *46% of the students were enrolled during November, 1977, at a grade higher than that they had last left.*

Table 1 shows the November, 1977 enrolment by grade for each grade the students had last left.

TABLE 1

GRADES STUDENTS LAST LEFT AND GRADES STUDENTS WERE ENROLLED IN DURING NOVEMBER, 1977 (N = 840)

Grade Last Left	November, 1977 Enrolment by Grade					Total
	9	10	11	12	13	
5	1	1				2
7	3	2	3	2	1	11
8	20	3	1	2	1	27
9	79	37	30	14	3	163
10	9	92	82	46	9	238
11	8	9	120	74	17	228
12		5	11	68	36	120
13			2	4	45	51
TOTAL	120	149	249	210	112	840

Of the 840 students for whom data were available 46% had progressed to a higher grade since they had returned to school, 48% were registered in the same grade, and 6% were registered in a lower grade* (data for the length of time the student had been back in school were not gathered in this study).

A further breakdown on these percentages is shown in Table 2. Approximately 17% of these students had progressed two or more grades since they had last dropped out.

TABLE 2

GRADE CHANGES FROM TIME STUDENTS LAST DROPPED OUT TO NOVEMBER, 1977
(N = 840)

Grade Change	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Lower Grade		
2 grades lower	15	2
1 grade lower	33	4
(TOTAL Lower Grade)	(48)	(6)
Same Grade	404	48
Higher Grade		
1 grade higher	249	30
2 grades higher	99	12
3 grades higher	26	3
4 grades higher	9	1
5 grades higher	4	1
6 grades higher	1	
(TOTAL Higher Grade)	(388)	(46)
TOTAL	840	100

* Of the 840 students, 48 students reported being enrolled at a lower grade level than they had left. Some of these students may have supplied incorrect information; however, the investigators 'phoned a few of these at random to check the data and found that some students had indeed enrolled at a lower level to obtain a certain program of studies. Other students were taking courses at several grade levels and were unsure what grade level they were really in, and still others were registered in home rooms at a lower grade than the one at which they were studying.

Changes Returning Students Made in Level of Study

- *25% of the returning students who had last left Ontario schools were enrolled during November, 1977, at a level higher or lower than they had last left.*

Table 3 provides the number of returning students who dropped out of high schools in Ontario and who re-enrolled at higher and lower levels of study than the ones from which they had dropped out.

Of the 913 students for whom data were available, approximately 12% were enrolled at a higher level than they had last left, 13% were enrolled at a lower level, and 75% were enrolled in the same level. A further breakdown of these percentages is given in Table 4.

TABLE 3

LEVELS STUDENTS LAST LEFT AND LEVELS STUDENTS WERE ENROLLED IN DURING NOVEMBER, 1977 (N = 913 STUDENTS WHO LEFT ONTARIO SCHOOLS)

Level Last Left	November, 1977 Enrolment by Level						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
1	1		3	1	2		7
2		22	8	10	1		41
3		2	119	26	6		153
4			32	269	46	1	348
5		1	10	77	276		364
6							0
TOTAL	1	25	172	383	331	1	913

A closer look at Table 3 reveals that level 4 students were almost as likely to move down to level 3 as to move up to level 5, that level 3 students were most likely to move up to level 4, that level 2 students were likely to move to levels 3 or 4, and finally that level 5 students were most likely to move down to level 4. The largest number of students who made any particular change of level was those who changed from level 5 to level 4 -- they represented 8% or 77 of the 913 students for whom information was available.

TABLE 4

LEVEL CHANGES FROM TIME ONTARIO STUDENTS LAST DROPPED OUT TO NOVEMBER, 1977
(N = 913)

Level Change	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Lower Level		
3 levels lower	1	1
2 levels lower	10	
1 level lower	111	12
(TOTAL Lower Level)	(122)	(13)
Same Level	687	75
Higher Level		
1 level higher	80	9
2 levels higher	20	2
3 levels higher	2	½
4 levels higher	2	
(TOTAL Higher Level)	(104)	(12)
TOTAL	913	100

The Leaving School Early Program

Data on participation in the Leaving School Early Program were not analyzed because many students appeared to have incorrect ideas of what it is. For example, 114 students who had dropped out only once reported that they had been in the Leaving School Early Program; however, 63 or 55.3% of these students also reported they they had dropped out after turning 16. Of 141 students who said they had been in the Leaving School Early Program, 48 were clearly too old to have taken part in it -- that is, they turned 16 before the program began.

Experiences and Wishes Concerning Work

The form filled out by returning students also contained several questions which were part of a study of students' attitudes toward work and unemployment which were also answered by all students. In this section the responses of returning students will be briefly compared with those of students who had never dropped out; a more detailed analysis will be presented in Students' Attitudes To Work and Unemployment: Part I: The Survey (Research Report #151, in press).

Returning students were more likely than students who had never dropped out both to have wanted and to have had a job the previous summer. They were also more likely to have looked for a part-time job at which they could work while going to school, to have had a part-time job, and to have a part-time job paying more than ten dollars every week in November, 1977. Returning students were also much more likely to report that they would like to combine part-time schooling with work.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Using a simple questionnaire answered by 86% of all regular Toronto high school students in November, 1977, we identified 1,150 returning students. This number represented 3.9% of the 29,499 students who answered the questionnaire.

Who is the Toronto returning student? Our study discovered that the returning student --

-- is a male (60%*)

-- dropped out of a Toronto high school (75%)

-- dropped out once (86%)

-- dropped out at age 15, 16, or 17 (76%)

-- was born in 1960, 1959, or 1958 or was 17, 18, or 19 years of age (67%)

-- dropped out of grades 9, 10 or 11 (76%)

-- was enrolled in grades 10, 11, or 12 in November 1977 (73%)

-- dropped out of levels 4 or 5 in Ontario (77%)

-- was enrolled in levels 4 or 5 in November 1977 (76%)

-- re-enrolled in the same school (64%)

While the above sketch tells a lot about Toronto returning students, it does not adequately describe some of the interesting points about various subsets of the returning students. The following summarizes the findings for eight subsets of returning students. We have chosen the subsets according to characteristics which are obvious to staff in the high schools -- sex, grade, level, and school last left.

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* The percentages have been rounded off.

Summary of Characteristics of Returning Students by Sex, Grade, Level and School Last Left

Returning Students Who Are Women

The Patterns of Dropping Out Study (Young and Reich, 1974) found that 44% of the high school dropouts for the school year 1973-4 were women. This study found that approximately 40% of the returning students are women.

We found that the returning students who are women tend to have dropped out at a younger age and in lower grades than the returning students who are men. Of students who had dropped out only once, the women were more likely than the men to have dropped out before 16. The women were also less likely than the men to remain in school past the age of 18. Upon returning, the women tend to be approximately the same age as the men, but enrolled in lower grades. These findings suggest that the women tended to stay out of school longer than the men. Because of the longer period of time out of school, the women may have forgotten more of their school work than men and may thus require more remedial help. In addition, these findings suggest that women must also tend to be among classmates who are more different in age (younger) than those with whom the men are associated. It seems reasonable then to expect that the women may experience more difficulties socially than the men.

Some studies (see Literature Review, page 2) have found that women do not drop out and return as often as men. We did not find this to be the case for Toronto returning students -- only about 14% of both sexes had dropped out more than once. We found that women tended to enrol in a different school at about the same rate as men -- 36% enrolled in a different school. We also discovered that women tended to have similar patterns of leaving and re-enrolment by level as the men -- 77% left levels 4 and 5 in Ontario while 76% were enrolled in levels 4 and 5.

Returning Students Who Are Men

The Patterns of Dropping Out study (Young & Reich, 1974) found that 56% of the high school dropouts for the school year 1973-74 were men. This study found that approximately 60% of the returning students are men.

We did not find the characteristics of returning students who are men to be similar to those of the women, nor to be similar to those that other authors have suggested (see Literature Review, page 2). For example, we did not find that the men dropped out and returned more often than the women -- approximately 86% of both sexes had dropped out once. We discovered that the men had not dropped out as young nor in as low grades as the women. We also found that the men were less likely to be one-time dropouts before 16 and more likely to still be in school after 18 than the women. Men were enrolled at higher grades in November 1977 than the women, were probably not out of school as long, and were probably enrolled with classmates who were closer in age to themselves than the women were.

As a brief aside, the finding that 86% of the students had dropped out only once could indicate that returning students tend to be a fairly stable group and that a rather small body of students have developed a habit of dropping out and returning -- many people might consider this good. On the contrary, the findings might mean that schools are reluctant to admit a student for a second, third or fourth return.

Students Who Returned to a Different Toronto School

Of the students who last left a Toronto high school, 36% returned to a different Toronto high school -- this is a considerable number. Students who had returned to different schools than the ones they had left tended to have dropped out in lower grades and at earlier ages than students who had re-enrolled in the school they had left, and to be enrolled (in

November, 1977) in lower grades; however, they also tended to be older in November, 1977 and to have dropped out more than once.

Students Who Returned to the Same Toronto School

The majority of the students, approximately 64%, returned to the Toronto high school they had last left. On the whole, these students seem to be a more stable group than the smaller group who enrolled in a different school. They were enrolled at higher grades, having dropped out at higher grades and at an older age. They tended not to have dropped out as often or to have stayed out as long. They would consequently be closer to the age of their classmates than students who enrolled in a different school.

Interestingly enough, we found no patterns in the levels of study the students left or in the levels of study they re-enrolled in according to whether they returned to a different or the same school.

Returning Students Who Were Enrolled in the Junior Grades in November, 1977

We found that 32% of the returning students were enrolled in the junior grades (grades 9 and 10) in November, 1977. The reader must remember that one of the reasons we found fewer students enrolled in the junior grades than the senior grades is that the study included all returning students regardless of the number of years they had been back -- thus, many who had enrolled in the junior grades originally would naturally have progressed to the senior grades by November, 1977.

The students we found in the junior grades were more likely to be women, to be studying at levels 1, 2 or 3, and to have dropped out more than once, than the students we found in the senior grades. They were also more likely to have dropped out of the junior grades, to have dropped out of levels 1, 2 or 3, and to be one-time dropouts before turning 16. And finally, they were more likely than the students enrolled in the senior grades to have returned to a different school.

Returning students enrolled in the junior grades have obviously experienced more change and disruption in their school career at a younger age than returning students who are enrolled in the senior grades. They are mostly women dropping out of and returning to the level 1, 2 and 3 schools.

Returning Students Who Were Enrolled in the Senior Grades in November, 1977

We found that 68% of the returning students were enrolled in the senior grades in November, 1977. These students, many of whom had probably been back for more than a year, were more likely to be men and more likely to be studying at levels 4 and 5 than the returning students enrolled in the junior grades. They were also less likely to have dropped out more than once and more likely to have dropped out of levels 4 and 5. They had also not dropped out as soon as the students enrolled in the junior grades, either in terms of the age left or in terms of the grade they dropped out of. This group of returning students is obviously a more stable group and a group with higher level academic plans who have stuck with education and a particular school more consistently than the group of returning students enrolled in the junior grades.

Returning Students Who Were Enrolled in Levels 1, 2 or 3 in November, 1977

Returning students enrolled in levels 2 and 3 were over-represented as compared to the general body of students enrolled in levels 2 and 3 -- 23.4% of the returning students were enrolled in levels 2 and 3; 13.6% of the population of high school students were enrolled in these levels. These returning students tended to be younger than returning students enrolled in levels 4 and 5, to more likely have dropped out of the junior grades, and to more likely be enrolled in the junior grades in November, 1977 than returning students in levels 4 and 5. Returning students, particularly at level 3, were more likely to have dropped out before turning 16 than those

enrolled in levels 4 and 5. Students studying in November, 1977 at levels 1, 2 or 3 were also more likely to have dropped out more than once than returning students studying at levels 4 and 5.

We found no tendency for returning students at these levels to be either one sex or the other, and also found no association between levels of enrolment and whether or not the students had returned to the same school.

The most interesting thing to note here is the obvious link between levels 1, 2 and 3, junior grades, dropping out at a young age, dropping out more than once, and being young in November, 1977.

Returning Students Who Were Enrolled in Levels 4 and 5 in November, 1977

The number of returning students enrolled in levels 4 and 5 is a most interesting finding. In comparison with the population of Toronto high school students, returning students enrolled in level 4 are greatly over-represented (39% vs. 26.4%), while returning students enrolled in level 5 are greatly under-represented (37.1% vs. 58.4%).

The returning students enrolled at these levels are more likely to be older, more likely to be enrolled in the senior grades, less likely to have been a one-time dropout before 16, and less likely to have dropped out more than once.

These findings which are reported in a number of ways throughout this report, strongly suggest that the level 4-5 schools have quite a different type of returning student than the level 1-2-3 schools. The level 4-5 schools also enroll over three-quarters of the returning students.

Returning Students' Progress

Returning students appear not to stay in school long once they have returned. For example, only 46% were enrolled in a grade higher than the one they had left. Table 1 on page 32 shows that in each grade,

a large proportion of students who had left that grade had still not passed it (some were even at a lower grade).

Returning students also do not seem to spend a long time out of school before returning. The median age at which returning students had last dropped out was 16, and their median year of birth was 1960 -- people born in 1960 were still 16 at the beginning of 1977. Further relevant evidence is that 80% of one-time dropouts who had dropped out under 16 were still under 16 in November, 1977.

Returning Students' Changes in Levels of Study

The majority of returning students (approximately 75%) who had left Ontario schools did not change the level at which they were studying when they returned to a school in Toronto. This finding could indicate that students are, on the whole, satisfied with the level of study at which they had previously studied or it could mean that it is relatively difficult to change to a new level, having once made a choice of level.

The most common change of level (8% or 77 of 913 students) was that of moving from level 5 to level 4. One would suspect that these students have decided to go back to school mainly to obtain a grade 12 diploma. The second most common tendency was for level 2 and 3 students (6% or 51 of 913) to move up one, two or three levels -- again most (or 4%) moved into level 4.

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The Toronto Board of Education is conducting two research studies. One is about students who have dropped out of school and returned, and the other is about the attitudes of students toward work and unemployment. In order to begin the studies, we are asking each Toronto Secondary student to answer the following questions. Please circle your answers.

		CIRCLE ANSWERS
1.	What level (program) are MOST of your courses in?	1 2 3 4 5
2.	Did you want a job last summer?	1YES 0NO
3.	Did you have a job last summer?	1YES 0NO
4.	Have you ever looked for a part-time job at which you could work while going to school?	1YES 0NO
5.	Have you ever had a part-time job while going to school?	1YES 0NO
6.	Do you now have a part-time job at which you make more than ten dollars every week?	1YES 0NO
7.	Would you like to combine part-time schooling with work?	1YES 0NO
8.	In your opinion, what percentage of young people under the age of 25 in Canada are unemployed?	4 to 7 per cent 1 7 to 10 per cent 2 10 to 13 per cent 3 13 to 16 per cent 4 Over 16 per cent 5 Don't Know 6
9.	Have you ever 'dropped out' of school?	1YES 0NO

If you answered YES to Question 9, please answer questions 10 to 15.

If you answered NO to Question 9, please return the form to your teacher.

10. How many times have you dropped out? 1 2 3 4

11. Have you ever been in the Leaving School Early program? 1YES 0NO

Please answer the following questions for the LAST time you dropped out.

12. What grade were you in when you last dropped out? 07 08 09 10 11 12 13

13. What level (program) were MOST of your courses in? 1 2 3 4 5

14. How old were you? 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21

15. What school did you leave? ..... NAME_____

BOARD_____

CITY_____

PROVINCE (or Country, if the school is not in Canada)

51 _____

★ Would you please give us your 'phone number -- a few of you will be 'phoned for more of your ideas about school and work..... ___ ___ ___ - ___ ___ ___ ___

APPENDIX B

Grades were deciphered from class codes by a computer program which assigned grades according to the following principles:

1. grades were inferred only if the code contained one of the numbers from 9 through 13 (actually, grade 9 was inferred only if the code contained "09");

2. if the code contained one of the numbers from 9 through 13, a grade was assigned only if that number was at the end of the code, or if it was at the end of the code, or if it was followed by a letter;

3. if the code contained two numbers, from which a grade could be inferred, separated by a letter or letters, the grade was inferred from the first number.

The only problem which arose was with class codes from three schools which use four character codes consisting of the letters 'SV' followed by a two-digit serial number. For example, from the code SV12, it would be inferred that this class was in grade 12, although that would not necessarily be true. However, only three students had such class codes.